



**SAM**  
Rights & Liberties



## The Cost of Advocacy

A report documenting seven months of detention of lawyer  
Abdulmajeed Sabra and its human and legal impact

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## About Us

# SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties

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SAM is an independent, non-profit Yemeni human rights organization that began its activities in January 2016 and obtained a license to operate in December 2017. The organization aims to document human rights violations in Yemen, work to stop violations through advocacy in partnership with local and international organizations, raise human rights awareness through societal rights development, and hold human rights violators accountable in Yemen in collaboration with international mechanisms and human rights organizations.





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## Introduction

The case of Yemeni lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra represents a stark example of the collapse of the rule of law and the erosion of legal safeguards in Yemen. His arbitrary arrest on September 25, 2025, reflects a dangerous shift in the targeting of human rights defenders. This detention, carried out outside any legal justification and without formal charges, is not an isolated incident; rather, it falls within a systematic pattern aimed at shrinking the space for independent human rights work and intimidating those working in the legal profession in order to deter them from carrying out their role in protecting victims.

This documentation seeks to reveal the circumstances of the enforced disappearance to which Sabra was subjected, and to shed light on the grave violations affecting the independence of the legal profession, warning of the profound repercussions of this targeting on the justice system as a whole in an environment where accountability is absent and the judiciary is politicized.



## Executive Summary

This report documents the case of Yemeni lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra, who was arrested on September 25, 2025, by a security body affiliated with the authorities in control of his area, and who remains in detention as of the date of preparation of this report, without any formal charges being brought against him or his appearance before a competent judicial authority. According to information gathered from multiple sources, including members of his family and colleagues in the profession, the conditions of his detention remain unclear, with almost complete interruption of communication with him since the moment of his arrest.

This case is classified within patterns of arbitrary detention and possible enforced disappearance, given the absence of any legal basis for the detention and the denial of basic guarantees of a fair trial, including the right to know the reasons for his arrest, the right to communicate with a lawyer and his family, and the right to be brought before a judge within a reasonable period of time. These facts indicate a clear violation of Yemen's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, particularly Article 9 concerning personal liberty, as well as their inconsistency with the absolute prohibition of enforced disappearance under international law.

The report concludes with a number of key findings, most notably that Abdulmajeed Sabra has been detained for seven months outside the framework of the law, without any announced judicial procedures, and in conditions that raise serious concerns about his physical and psychological safety. The available information also indicates the possibility that he has been subjected to ill-treatment or torture, in the absence of judicial oversight and in light of the lack of transparency regarding places of detention. This case is also an additional indicator of a broader pattern of targeting lawyers and activists, undermining the independence of the legal profession and limiting access to justice.

Based on the foregoing, this report calls on the relevant authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Abdulmajeed Sabra, or to bring him without delay before a fair trial that meets international standards, while guaranteeing his right to defense and to communicate with his family. It also calls for the immediate disclosure of his place of detention and health condition, and for the opening of an independent and transparent investigation into the circumstances of his arrest. The report further calls on the international community, including the Human Rights Council, to intensify efforts to exert pressure to end practices of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in Yemen, and to strengthen accountability mechanisms to ensure that there is no impunity.



## Methodology

This report relied on a multi-source documentation approach, combining fieldwork, legal analysis, and digital verification, with the aim of building an accurate and reliable narrative about the incident of the detention of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra, its circumstances, and its context.

As part of the information-gathering process, the research team conducted direct and systematic communication with the victim's family, including in-depth interviews focused on the details of the arrest, attempts to search for him, and the effects of his absence at both the humanitarian and livelihood levels. Contact was also made with a number of lawyers and human rights defenders connected to the case or working within the same legal environment, with the aim of understanding the professional and legal context of the arrest and assessing the extent to which the measures taken complied with local and international legal guarantees.

In addition, the report relied on indirect testimonies from witnesses and informed sources, while taking into account the sensitivity of the security context. Open sources were also used, including published statements, previous human rights reports, and media content, to support the information and build a broader picture of the pattern of violations associated with the case.

With regard to verification mechanisms, the team used a cross-checking methodology based on matching testimonies received from different sources and comparing the chronology of events across multiple accounts, thereby reducing contradictions and strengthening reliability. The security and political context surrounding the case was also analyzed in order to understand the motives behind the arrest and the possibility of its connection to broader patterns of violations, rather than treating it as an isolated incident.

The documentation process faced a number of limitations and challenges, foremost among them the difficulty of directly accessing places of detention or verifying the actual conditions of detention, as a result of imposed security restrictions. Genuine fears also emerged among some witnesses and sources about giving their testimonies publicly, out of fear of harassment or retaliation, which required the research team to adopt strict standards for protecting identity and confidentiality.

Likewise, consideration was given to the risk that the advocacy process itself could lead to increased pressure on the victim or his family, which required a careful balance between the duty to document and reveal the truth, and the humanitarian and security considerations associated with the case.

Based on the foregoing, this report seeks to present a documented and objective account as far as possible, while acknowledging that the restrictions imposed on access to information in such contexts may partially affect the comprehensiveness of the data, without undermining the substance of the findings and conclusions contained herein.



## General Context in Yemen



Since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Yemen in 2014, arrest has no longer been a regulated legal measure governed by legal provisions; rather, it has gradually turned into an instrument of power used outside the framework of the law to eliminate opponents, subjugate society, and reshape the public sphere by force. In this context, the phenomenon of arbitrary detention has emerged as one of the most widespread violations, whereby individuals are detained without judicial warrants, or on the basis of vague charges of a political or security nature, often without enabling them to communicate with a lawyer or bringing them before an independent judicial authority.

This intersects with the clear politicization of the justice system. In many areas, the judiciary is no longer an independent authority, but rather a tool used to provide a formal legal cover for predetermined security decisions. Instead of being a refuge for protection, the judiciary has, in many cases, become part of the system of violation, whether through issuing rulings that lack the minimum guarantees of a fair trial, or through silence regarding practices of unlawful detention.

As for the legal safeguards that are supposed to constitute the first line of defense for rights and freedoms – such as the right to personal liberty, the presumption of innocence, and the right to defense – they have undergone profound erosion. Human rights reports indicate the spread of patterns of enforced disappearance, incommunicado detention, and deprivation of detainees of their basic rights, in an environment where effective judicial supervision is absent and the rules of criminal procedure are systematically undermined. Thus, the question in Yemen is no longer: Is an individual arrested outside the law? Rather, it is: To what extent can this departure from the law continue without accountability?

## Targeting Lawyers and Activists



The case of Abdulmajeed Sabra falls within a broader pattern of restrictions on lawyers and activists in Yemen, where local and international human rights organizations have documented multiple cases of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and harassment targeting those working in the legal and human rights fields. This pattern shows indicators of efforts by de facto authorities to shrink the space for independent work and limit lawyers' ability to perform their role in representing victims or holding perpetrators of violations accountable.

In this context, similar cases have been recorded involving lawyers and activists who were detained for varying periods without clear charges being brought against them or their appearance before a competent judicial authority, in violation of the standards set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, particularly the guarantees related to personal liberty and fair trial. These practices also reflect an increasingly dangerous environment for human rights work, where independent legal activity is viewed as a source of threat rather than as a fundamental pillar for achieving justice.

Within this landscape, lawyers and human rights activists are no longer merely civil actors; they have become direct targets. The role performed by a lawyer, as a defender of rights and an intermediary between the individual and the judicial system, makes him vulnerable to targeting in conflict environments, especially when he handles sensitive cases involving influential parties or exposing grave violations.

The Yemeni reality in recent years has shown a recurring pattern of restrictions on lawyers and activists, taking multiple forms, including threats, harassment, prohibition from practicing their work, and extending to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. These measures are often justified by broad charges such as "undermining security" or "collaborating with hostile entities," without presenting clear evidence, and in the absence of fair trial standards.

Documented cases also indicate that lawyers have been targeted because they undertook the defense of political detainees or victims of violations, or because of their activity in documenting these violations and submitting them to international organizations. In this context, the targeting of a lawyer is not seen as an individual act, but as part of a broader policy aimed at dismantling the system of defending rights and weakening any possibility of accountability and truth-revealing.

The organization "DeYemnt" for Rights and Development revealed that it documented 382 violations committed by the Houthi group against male and female lawyers in the Capital Secretariat of Sana'a, during the period from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2025. The organization explained that it recorded 159 violations during 2025, compared to 135 violations in 2023 and 88 violations in 2024, pointing to the systematic violations targeting defenders of rights and freedoms, and the serious undermining they represent to the justice system and the rule of law in areas under the group's control.

The impact of targeting lawyers is not limited to the individuals concerned; rather, it extends to the very essence of justice itself. When a lawyer is intimidated, victims' ability to access

justice is paralyzed, and the legal system is reshaped as a tool of control rather than a mechanism of redress. In this context, the case of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra gains its broader significance, as it is not an isolated case, but rather a concentrated expression of a structural crisis in the relationship between authority and law in Yemen.

Lawyer Samah Subai says: “Lawyers working in the field of advocacy, providing assistance, and legal follow-up face many challenges. From the first moments of their invasion of cities and their coup against state institutions, including the security and army institutions, the Houthis set out to try to destroy the judiciary and the legal institution in general, through the formation of committees called grievance committees. Through their supervisors, these committees withdrew many cases from before the judiciary, especially cases related to killings and land disputes. They would try to resolve them in one or two tribal sessions, within hours and sometimes within a single day, and then announce that they had been resolved. But after a period of time, the matter was discovered, and litigants returned with their files and cases to the judiciary once again, which created a major problem for the judiciary.”

She adds: “As for lawyers, the Houthis have a belief that a lawyer is misleading and dishonest and lacks any moral principle. This stems from a belief they hold that Imam Ali used to reject representatives in litigation, whom they regard as the equivalent of lawyers, and that if a representative in litigation came to him, he would reject him and imprison him, according to what they say. As for lawyers who work in defending detainees and victims of violations, including detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, they are viewed differently; these people are considered enemies and there is not even room to speak with them. Many of the lawyers who worked on these cases, in which victims were accused of being informants and spies, had their cards withdrawn, some were prevented from entering the court and trial sessions, some were assaulted, and some were arrested from the beginning. It is strictly forbidden for the victim’s lawyer to obtain the case files; if he wants to review the file, he may only look at it and write down his notes if he can, but he has no right to obtain the file. This is among the problems. We now know what is happening in terms of arrests and pursuit of these lawyers; many of them have left the areas controlled by the Houthi group, the most recent being Mr. Abdulmajeed Sabra. There are other lawyers who have been detained by the group for a long time, but their families refuse to speak about this matter as a result of the terror practiced by the group against these families and against lawyers.”

Accordingly, the targeting of Sabra cannot be separated from this broader context; rather, it is an additional indicator of the erosion of legal safeguards and the increasing risks faced by lawyers and activists in carrying out their duties, in the absence of effective mechanisms for accountability or protection.



## Victim Profile and Context of Targeting

Abdulmajeed Sabra is a Yemeni lawyer and father of children, living in the capital, Sana'a, which is under the control of the Houthi group. He was known for his professional activity in providing legal pleadings and defending rights, including cases of a human rights-related and sensitive nature in the context of the ongoing conflict in Yemen. According to the information gathered, he carried out a professional role that went beyond traditional legal representation, including contributing to the promotion of the principles of the rule of law and defending basic procedural safeguards, which earned him a notable presence in legal and community circles.

Sabra is regarded in his professional environment as one of the legal voices that sought to use the law as a tool to protect rights and freedoms, which made him vulnerable to increasing risks in an environment marked by the decline of judicial independence and the growing restrictions imposed on human rights work. No official information is available to justify his detention or identify its legal basis, which reinforces concerns that his targeting may be linked to the nature of his work and professional activity, particularly in cases that may be considered politically or security-sensitive.





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## Timeline of the Violation



**Abdulmajeed Sabra**  
Lawyer and legal consultant



# 210

days in the shadows

"An injustice in a time unworthy of his justice and kind heart"

25 September 2025

**25**  
September  
2025

His office in Sana'a was raided and he was arrested



**5**  
October  
2025

Enforced disappearance and a single phone call indicating that he was being held in solitary confinement



**25**  
January  
2026

He was transferred to a prison in the Shamlan area and weekly visits were allowed



**March**  
2026

Broad UN condemnation through private contacts close to the Human Rights Council



**April**  
2026

Completion of 200 days in detention without trial or formal charges



## Arrest and Detention Trajectory: From Professional Targeting to Isolation and Cut Off from the Outside World

The facts surrounding the arrest of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra reveal that the case is not merely an isolated individual detention, but rather a gradual trajectory of professional targeting and psychological pressure. It began before the arrest through campaigns of incitement and threats, then turned into an incident in which he was taken from his office, and ended in prolonged detention under ambiguous and harsh conditions, including being cut off from his family and lawyer, solitary confinement, and pressure to accept undisclosed conditions.

This trajectory shows that Sabra's detention was not separate from his activity as a lawyer and advocate for detainees' cases. Rather, according to the available information, it appears to be an undeclared punishment for exercising his right to defense and expression, raising serious concerns about the erosion of legal safeguards and the transformation of arrest into a tool to silence lawyers and intimidate human rights defenders.



## Before the Arrest

The information gathered indicates that lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra, aged (...) years, was practicing his professional activity as usual, including pleading and defending detainees in cases of a political and human rights nature. According to informed sources, during the period preceding his arrest, Sabra was subjected to campaigns of threats and incitement on social media, against the background of his public positions and his criticisms of some existing policies.

Hours before his arrest, Sabra posted a comment on the “Facebook” platform criticizing what he described as double standards in allowing the organization of political events for one party, while restricting other events, in reference to the commemoration of the September 26 Revolution. It is likely that this public activity was among the direct reasons that led to his targeting.

## The Moment of Arrest

On September 25, armed men believed to be affiliated with the de facto authorities in Sana'a raided lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra's office in the Shamila area, south of the capital, while he was celebrating with his daughter Asmaa the birth of her first child. Five individuals raided the office, some in civilian clothes and others in military uniform. They showed him a paper that no one else saw, and told his daughter that her father would return after a few hours and that there was no reason to worry. Since his detention, he has not been able to communicate with a lawyer or his family, which raises serious concerns regarding the legality of the procedure.

According to statements given by his daughter Asmaa to SAM Organization, lawyer Sabra was arrested from his office at 3:00 p.m. Yemen time and taken to an unknown location, after his personal belongings and the contents of his office were confiscated. Asmaa Abdulmajeed Sabra says: “When my father was arrested, I was with him in the office from the morning until the time of his arrest, together with my child, so that we could prepare for my child's first birthday. We were happy with the celebration before five people entered; two of them were in military uniform, two others were in civilian clothes, and the fifth began filming the office. At that time, my father was praying the afternoon prayer, so they waited until he finished praying. At first, I thought they were people with cases handled by my father, so they did not frighten me at first. After he finished his prayer, they said to him: ‘Lawyer, please

come with us, you are detained for the duration of the investigation and you will return.’ They let him take his qat and his water. The manner was not bad, and they told us: ‘Four hours and he will return.’ At that moment I was shocked, and when they took him, they did not allow us to follow him.”

Asmaa adds: “That day was like Judgment Day for me. We were happy, and suddenly everything changed. The birthday turned into the worst day of our lives; a father is support and safety, and suddenly he disappears and we do not know where he is. We no longer feel safe or happy in his absence. Imagine that your father is alive and close to you, but you cannot touch him or speak to him; you feel the feeling of an orphan while your father is alive. What increases my anguish is that my father is one of the kindest, most compassionate, and safest people in this world. It is rare in our time to find someone as kind as my father, and then he is led away like a criminal.”

## After the Arrest

Sabra’s family remained in a state of anxiety, not knowing the place of his detention. On October 5, the phone of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra’s family rang for the first time after ten days of enforced disappearance. His voice coming from behind bars slightly calmed the state of panic, but a new chapter of suffering began in a solitary cell in Sana’a for more than a month, without knowing the place of his detention or the authority detaining him, and amid a complete interruption of communication. After about a month had passed, the family was able to obtain information indicating that he was being held in a facility affiliated with the Security and Intelligence Service in Sana’a, in the Shamlan area, specifically in an unofficial location within the area.

According to the available information, Sabra was held at this location for an unspecified period, before later being transferred on January 25 to another location in the Shamlan area (Sarf), and he remains detained as of the date of preparation of this report.

His son said in a statement to SAM: “My message is our conditions, our situation, and all the events – they are a sufficient message. If they are not moved by an entire people, how could my message affect anyone? Look at the condition of fathers and their anxiety over their children while they are behind bars and unable to do anything. Look at the visitation gate, and the conditions of sons, daughters, and families as they hurry to see their loved ones before the little time they have runs

out. Do these scenes not move you? My father has no charge whatsoever, and no charge has been proven against him so far. As for the post, it is nothing more than a personal opinion and not a crime. Give the people a little freedom. There is hardly anyone left outside the prisons. My father is a heroic and just person, and he does nothing except what is lawful.”

## Conditions of Detention and Treatment

Sources close to the family reported that Sabra was able to make his first phone call with his family about ten days after his detention, while he remained deprived of regular visits or continuous communication with his lawyer.

Testimonies indicate that Sabra was subjected to harsh detention conditions, including being placed in solitary confinement for twenty consecutive days, before later being returned to solitary isolation for an additional week. This led Sabra to go on a hunger strike that lasted ten days, in protest against his detention in solitary conditions.

The information also speaks of his exposure to psychological pressure and harsh treatment, and of conditions set by the Houthis for Sabra to agree to before his release. Despite his acceptance of these conditions, according to a message published by his brother Walid on his “Facebook” page, without clarifying the nature of these conditions, the Houthis continue to detain lawyer Sabra to this moment. These conditions constitute a form of unacceptable blackmail, a behavior that the Houthi group has repeatedly practiced with arbitrarily detained persons. According to some activists, these conditions are related to his activity as a lawyer.

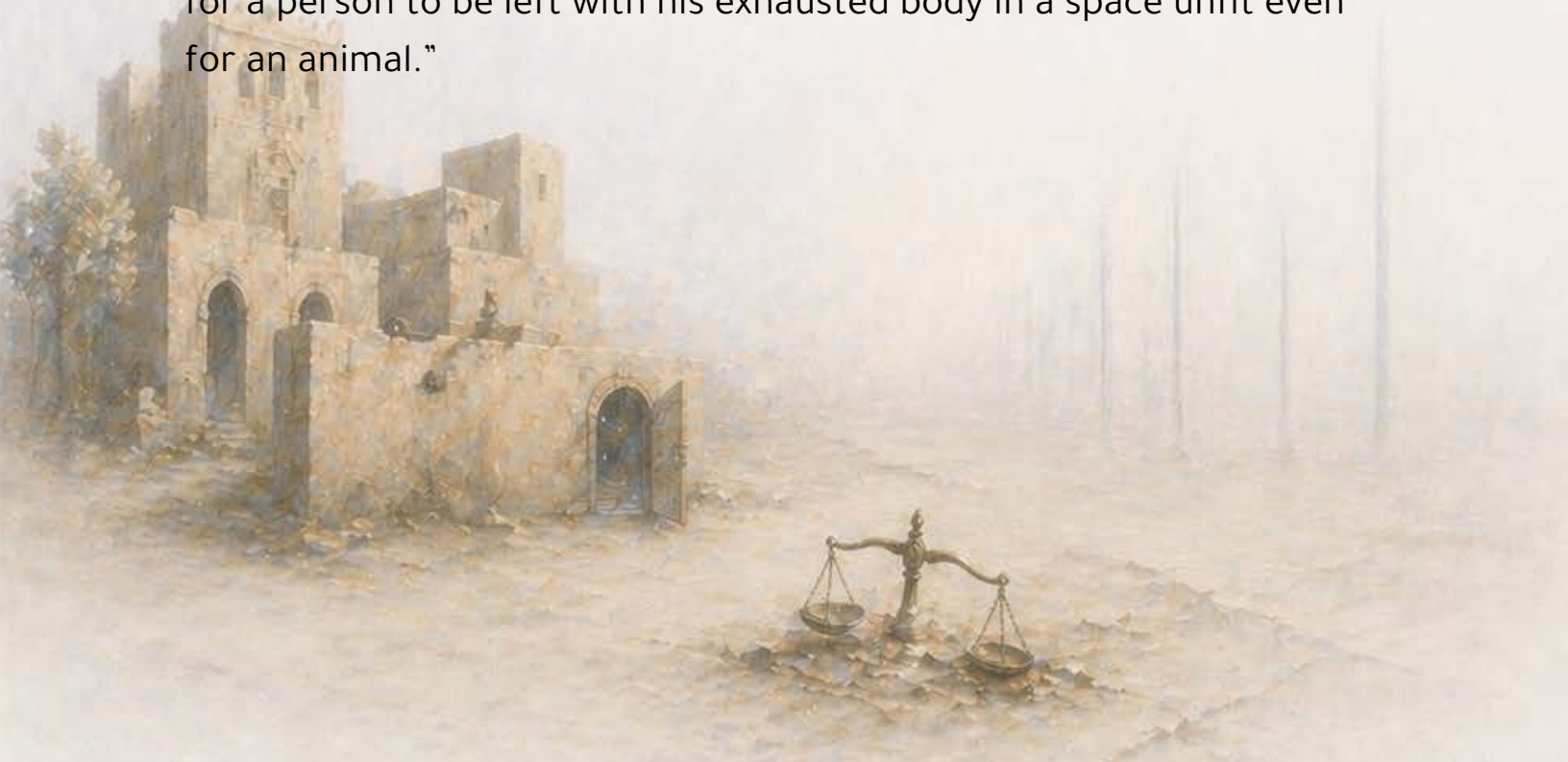
Lawyer Huda al-Sarari said, commenting on what lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra is being subjected to: “What is stated in this testimony is serious and raises concerns related to violations of the basic guarantees of detainees, such as the right to communicate with his relatives and family, and also to communicate with a lawyer for the victim in order to guarantee his right to legal defense. His exposure to solitary confinement and harsh treatment also constitutes a serious violation, and the continuation of his detention in these conditions and pushing him to go on hunger strike is a worrying indicator of the deterioration of his humanitarian situation. It requires intervention to ensure his physical and psychological safety, and to enable him to exercise his right to defense and access to justice.”

## Communication with the Family

Communication between Sabra and his family remained limited and intermittent. According to the latest information, his last communication with his family was on Sunday, April 12, when his family was allowed to visit him in the new detention facility to which he had been transferred, without confirmed information being available about his health condition or current detention conditions.

In one of the calls, the family reported that he said he was being held in a solitary cell, calling on his fellow lawyers and the Bar Association to take urgent action to follow up on his case. Journalist Akram al-Walidi, a former detainee who had been sentenced to death by the Houthis group before being released, commented on the conditions of Sabra's detention in a solitary cell, saying: "The solitary cell under the Houthis is not a room, but a compressor; a place that does not fit a human body naturally. You cannot stand, and you cannot stretch out. You sit bent over, folded into yourself, as if trying to disappear inside your own body. Some of these compressor cells are no more than two meters by one and a half meters, while others are even harsher, forcing you to sit in a squatting position for days and months, until pain becomes part of your body. Time there is not measured in days, and there is no rule; the period is not a judicial sentence but the mood of a jailer. Some remain in it throughout the period of their abduction until their release; some spend a full year there, others six months, others four or five, and others three, and all of them are enough to change a person forever."

He adds: "In the compressor cell, it is not only the body that is tortured; dignity is crushed, and a person's patience is tested to the utmost limit. There, one does not need only torture tools; it is enough for a person to be left with his exhausted body in a space unfit even for an animal."



## Current Situation at the Time of Preparing the Report

As of the date of preparation of this report, lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra remains detained since September 25, without any official disclosure of his place of detention or enabling him to communicate regularly with his family or lawyer. The available information indicates the continuation of his detention outside the framework of due legal procedures, and in conditions that lack the basic guarantees stipulated under national law and international standards.

As of the time of writing this report, no indications have been recorded that he has been brought before a competent judicial authority, that formal charges have been brought against him, or that he has been enabled to challenge the legality of his detention. This raises serious concerns that he is being subjected to arbitrary detention, and possibly enforced disappearance, in light of the interruption or restriction of information related to his fate and whereabouts.

The relevant authorities have also not taken any announced steps to guarantee his right to a fair trial within a reasonable period of time, including the right to defense, the presumption of innocence, and appearance before an independent and impartial judge. This undefined legal situation keeps lawyer Sabra in open-ended detention, in contradiction with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, particularly Article 9 concerning the prohibition of arbitrary detention, and Article 14 concerning fair trial guarantees.

Accordingly, the continuation of his detention without a clear legal basis and without effective judicial oversight constitutes a grave violation of the state's obligations under international human rights law, and requires urgent intervention to ensure his release or his presentation before a trial that meets international standards.

# Legal Status and Responsibility



An analysis of the facts related to the detention of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra shows that his deprivation of liberty took place outside any legitimate legal framework, in direct violation of the provisions of the Yemeni Constitution, particularly Article 48, which guarantees personal liberty, prohibits arrest or detention except in accordance with the law, requires that a detainee be brought before the judiciary within a specified period, and guarantees his right to defense and to communicate with whomever he chooses. This also violates the provisions of the Yemeni Criminal Procedure Law No. 13 of 1994, which stipulates the obligation to present an arrested person to the Public Prosecution within a period not exceeding 24 hours, and prohibits detaining him in unlawful places or without judicial basis. Accordingly, his detention is invalid from the perspective of national law, and constitutes a fundamental breach of the principle of procedural legality and the rule of law.

The continuation of his detention without a written legal basis or effective judicial oversight also constitutes an undermining of the function of the judiciary, and leads to the emergence of a parallel detention system outside the framework of the law, based on authoritarian will rather than binding legal rules, which empties constitutional guarantees of their substance and obstructs the right to a fair trial.

At the international level, this detention violates the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, particularly Article 9, which prohibits arbitrary detention and requires that a detainee be brought without delay before a judicial authority. The Human Rights Committee, in its General Comment No. 35, has affirmed that any detention that does not rest on a clear legal basis or is not subject to effective judicial oversight constitutes arbitrary detention.

The seriousness of the violation is aggravated by his detention in undisclosed locations and his deprivation of regular communication with his family and lawyer, which rises to the level of enforced disappearance under international standards, given that it involves denying the fate of the detainee and exposing him to grave risks. Subjecting him to prolonged solitary confinement also constitutes, according to what has been determined by the Special Rapporteur on torture, a form of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and may amount to torture in some cases.

The circumstances indicate that his arrest is linked to his professional activity as a lawyer and defender of detainees' rights, which constitutes a violation of international standards relating to the protection of human rights defenders, and undermines the independence of the legal profession, as affirmed by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

Based on the foregoing, this case may be characterized as arbitrary detention in violation of national and international law, a violation of the right to a fair trial, a possible case of enforced disappearance, and treatment that may amount to cruelty or inhumanity, in addition to being an assault on the independence of the legal profession.

In light of this, the de facto authorities in Sana'a bear full legal responsibility for this unlawful detention, including the direct responsibility of the security and intelligence agencies that carried out the arrest and supervised the detention, and the command responsibility of the higher authorities that exercise effective authority over them and should have known of these violations but failed to take the necessary measures to prevent or end them, in addition to responsibility arising from the failure to disclose the place of detention, bring him before the judiciary, or investigate the violations.

Taken together, these acts constitute a grave violation of national and international human rights obligations, requiring his immediate release or his presentation before a fair trial in accordance with legal standards, ensuring an independent and effective investigation, and holding all those responsible for these violations accountable, including both direct perpetrators and senior leaders.

# International Reactions



Within the framework of international human rights reactions, Amnesty International called on the Houthis to immediately and unconditionally release Abdulmajeed Sabra, considering him arbitrarily detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. It also described his detention as an additional and frightening escalation in the Houthis' efforts to silence those they perceive as critics of their policies, linked his case to a broader campaign against civic space in northern Yemen, and also called for his protection from torture and ill-treatment and for him to be allowed to contact his family and lawyer.

In its latest position, Amnesty International called on April 24 of this year for the Houthis to immediately release Sabra and all those who remain arbitrarily detained, including dozens of United Nations and civil society staff members who were arrested, arbitrarily detained, and forcibly disappeared during the broad crackdowns in 2024 and 2025.

Human Rights Watch also published a joint statement on behalf of 17 non-governmental organizations calling for Sabra's immediate and unconditional release from arbitrary detention. It stated that his family has no information about his whereabouts and has been unable to communicate with him, and that this may amount to enforced disappearance. It also placed his arrest within a broader pattern of arrests targeting those who commemorated September 26 or published content related to it.

In a subsequent follow-up, Human Rights Watch again included his case within a broader file on political arrests, and stressed the need for the immediate release of all arbitrarily detained persons, including those detained for commemorating September 26, journalists and lawyers, and dozens of United Nations and civil society staff members.

At the UN level, the joint communication issued by the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders and other UN experts highlighted that the case of Abdulmajeed Sabra concerns arbitrary arrest and detention in an unknown location, amounting to enforced disappearance. It expressed the utmost concern that his arrest was linked to his peaceful work in defending human rights and his exercise of freedom of expression, and also stressed his right to be promptly informed of the charges, to have access to his family, and to legal representation.

In a later public position, Special Rapporteur Mary Lawlor said that Abdulmajeed Sabra remained in detention without charge for nearly six months, that he had recently been allowed to communicate with his family, and appealed to the de facto authorities in Sana'a to release him. On the diplomatic level, the account of the European Union Mission in Yemen announced its support for the Special Rapporteur's request regarding Sabra, and emphasized the call for the immediate and unconditional release of all those arbitrarily detained by the Houthis.

This human rights position expanded through a joint statement republished by several international organizations, including the International Federation for Human Rights, the World Organisation Against Torture, and IFEX. The statement called for the immediate and unconditional release of Abdulmajeed Sabra and all those detained for peacefully exercising their rights, while calling for respect for freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and media freedom, and for ensuring that human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers, academics, and digital activists are able to work without fear of retaliation or judicial harassment.

In a subsequent professional human rights context, Front Line Defenders expressed grave concern for his physical and psychological safety after he went on hunger strike. It condemned his arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance, and called for his immediate release, ensuring his access to a lawyer and appropriate medical care, and ending arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance against human rights defenders.

The International Observatory for Lawyers in Danger also expressed deep concern over his arrest and incommunicado detention, considering that the targeting of lawyers engaged in the defense of human rights reflects a troubling pattern of interference in the legal profession and restriction of civic space. For its part, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe called for a swift and comprehensive review of his arrest, and for respect for his fundamental rights, including access to legal counsel, communication with his family, fair trial guarantees, and due process.

# Humanitarian Impacts



The case of the detention of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra reveals profound humanitarian impacts that go beyond the direct victim, extending to his family and the broader professional and legal environment, reflecting the compounded repercussions of arbitrary detention on the social fabric and the rule of law.

Sabra's family has been bearing increasing psychological and economic burdens since the moment of his arrest. The interruption of news about him for long periods has led to a continuous state of anxiety and uncertainty regarding his fate and safety, which is one of the most prominent features of suffering associated with cases of unlawful detention. Economically, the family lost its main source of income, which worsened its livelihood vulnerability in a deteriorating economic context, and forced it to bear additional burdens related to attempts to search for him and follow up on his case.

It is likely that Sabra's detention has direct and indirect negative effects on his children, especially in light of the absence of the primary breadwinner and the lack of clarity regarding the timeframe of his detention. Human rights literature indicates that children in such cases face psychological disturbances, including chronic anxiety, fear, and a sense of insecurity, in addition to effects on academic achievement and social adjustment.

The absence of regular communication with the father also exacerbates these effects and deepens the sense of loss. His daughter Asmaa says: "My little sister was affected; she is very attached to my father, and she is already sick – she has a hole in her heart. Before his arrest, she could sometimes say the word 'Baba,' but after his imprisonment, all day and even at night she would not stop: Baba, Baba, until we thought that she could feel him or that perhaps he was being tortured. As for occasions and holidays, we no longer feel them.

My father's absence has affected us greatly; the absence of a loving father has affected our psyche and the whole house. My father was a father and a support for many, not only for us. A father is support and safety. He was the one who fought life and its circumstances for the sake of his children, and now we are fighting life alone, fighting it while filled with pain over his imprisonment, while he is a righteous person who committed no wrongdoing. This first Eid passed without him; we did not feel it without him. It was an ordinary day; we did not feel its joy at all, because my father is Eid for us."

# The Impact on the Legal Community

Abdulmajeed Sabra was a support for the oppressed, and his arrest closed a door for many who were searching for someone to stand by them. The repercussions of this case extend to the legal community in Yemen, where the targeting of a lawyer because of his professional activity is considered a worrying indicator of restrictions on the independence of the legal profession. Such practices are likely to weaken lawyers' confidence in their ability to perform their duties freely and safely, especially in cases of political or human rights sensitivity, which negatively affects individuals' right to access justice and effective legal representation.



# Testimonies



**Lawyer Ammar Ali Yassin:**

“What can we say about Mr. Abdulmajeed except that he was truly among the few lawyers who dedicated themselves to defending detainees and abductees, and also those whose money was placed under judicial receivership and whose properties, savings, and homes were confiscated. He was present almost continuously at the Specialized Criminal Court, defending detainees when they reached trial and the prosecution offices. In fact, because he was always present, the court used to appoint him for many defendants being tried before it, and he undertook that role with courage and dedication. Even as far as I know, his financial circumstances were difficult, and he was not benefiting or receiving privileges. Nevertheless, he continued to struggle and confront the abuses committed by the court, the prosecution, or even the security agencies. He was threatened, as I learned, more than once, but he insisted on confronting them, and his ceiling was high in confrontation, while many lawyers became afraid – and we were among them – as we saw that the trial was a farce, and that there were threats and harassment that could affect lawyers. But he was courageous and a fighter, and we ask God to grant him relief.”

**Amat al-Salam al-Hajj:****Head of the Abductees' Mothers Association**

“There are voices that speak out for truth and justice, and work for freedom and human dignity. That is the lawyer and defender of the rights of the oppressed, Mr. Abdulmajeed Sabra, abducted by the Houthi group. We worked together on the issue of abducted men and women since 2015, before the establishment of the Association, and he continued to carry the cause until he was abducted by the Houthi group, which wants to silence the voice of truth and justice. The courage of Mr. Abdulmajeed and his standing by the oppressed will be counted for him as a testimony immortalized by generations.”

## Lawyer and human rights activist Abdulrahman Barman President of the American Center for Justice

In 2006, I began my first steps in the legal profession, when I joined the Allaw Foundation for Law and Legal Consultations. There I met lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra, who had entered the profession a few months before me, yet we received the training card from the Yemeni Bar Association, and then the license to practice the profession, on the same day. From that moment, the features of a different legal personality began to take shape before me.

Sabra was not an ordinary lawyer. He possessed a remarkable ability to draft legal memoranda and statements of defense in a precise style that combined accuracy and strength, to the extent that our teacher, lawyer Mohammed Naji Allaw, gave him a description that was not easily granted: “the jurist Sabra,” in reference to the depth of his understanding of legal texts and the spirit of the law.

But what truly distinguished Abdulmajeed Sabra was not only his professional excellence, but his conscious choice to side with the most difficult cases. In 2011, with the outbreak of the protests, he became involved in human rights work within the team of the HOOD Organization, following up on the cases of detainees from the youth of the revolution. He was present in the field, not content with pleadings from behind desks, but living the details of suffering with those affected.

I remember well the case of the Al-Nahdain Mosque, when I was the legal representative for 32 detainees, both civilians and military personnel. The investigations extended for long hours and required the presence of several lawyers at the same time. I invited many colleagues, but the only one who showed up on time was Abdulmajeed Sabra. He stood with me from the first moment of the investigation, through the prosecution sessions, until the detainees were released. He did not stop there, but continued following up on the rest of the case until the last detainees were released, even after I left Sana`a.

In 2013, work brought us together again when we jointly established the Barman Foundation for Law and Legal Consultations. Through it, Sabra dedicated his efforts to defending detainees and forcibly disappeared persons without charge, believing that justice should not be the preserve of those who have money. This path was not easy,

as it led to the Foundation being raided by the Houthi group, confiscated, and lawyers being prevented from working in it to this day.

Abdulmajeed Sabra was not seeking fame, nor was he pursuing material gains. He believed that freedom is a value that cannot be measured by profit and loss, and that defending the oppressed is not a job, but a position. For that reason, he gave his time, effort, money, and health, and chose to always be on the front lines, where the risks are greater but the meaning is deeper.

On the personal level, I had a relationship with him that went beyond professional collegiality. It was a relationship based on trust, respect, and shared experience in the most difficult circumstances, believing that lawyering is not only a legal skill, but an ethical responsibility, and that standing beside the oppressed may cost a great deal, but it gives a person a value that cannot be bought.

This is how I knew Abdulmajeed Sabra... not only as a skilled lawyer, but as a human being who chose to have his voice stand on the side of justice, even when the price was heavy.

**Firas Hamdouni – Programs Director, DT Institute:**

“On the anniversary of the arrest of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra in Yemen, we pause in appreciation of his journey in defending the rights of victims, survivors, and the oppressed, under complex and high-risk conditions. His work represented an example of professional and humanitarian commitment in an environment that often lacks the minimum levels of protection and support, as he continued to perform his role despite the challenges, with limited resources and marginal compensation. This anniversary is a reminder of the importance of protecting those working in the field of human rights, and of the need to provide a safe environment that enables them to carry out their mission, in a way that contributes to strengthening justice and preserving human dignity.”

**Iman Hameed**  
**President of Insaf Center**  
**Recipient of the French Marianne Initiative Award**

The arrest of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra reveals an ongoing approach aimed at silencing free voices and criminalizing anyone who defends rights or stands beside victims.

What is happening today no longer targets only politicians, journalists, or writers; it has extended to lawyers and those who defend them, in a dangerous indication of the widening circle of repression and the silencing of voices.

The continuation of these practices opens the door to an even more dangerous phase, in which targeting may be directed not only at individuals, but at everyone connected to them: their families, relatives, friends, and even their teachers.

Solidarity with lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra is solidarity with the human right to defense, with justice that must not be punished, and with speech that should not be imprisoned.

**Lawyer Tawfiq al-Humaidi, President of SAM Organization:**

“Lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra is not merely a lawyer who defended his clients, but a courageous legal voice who made justice a duty, not a profession. He stood beside victims and detainees in the most difficult circumstances, believing that rights do not fall away through fear and are not defeated by repression. His continued detention represents punishment for his exercise of his professional and human rights role, and a message of intimidation to everyone who defends the law. Freedom for Abdulmajeed Sabra, and justice for everyone who paid the price of the word, the pleading, and the conscience.”

### Lawyer Samah Subai:

“As for my assessment of the legal status of the case of Mr. Abdulmajeed Sabra, lawyer and human rights defender, I can say that he was subjected to a compound violation, meaning several violations. The first of these was his arbitrary arrest without any legal justification or legal basis from his office after it was raided by groups belonging to the Houthis on September 25, 2025. This is a crime, whether under international law or even Yemeni law. Under international treaties and conventions, for example, Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that no one may be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile. Likewise, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirms, in Article 9, the individual’s right to personal security, and obliges states to inform a person, in the event of his arrest; therefore, he must have the right to resort to a lawyer, and in an environment that at least observes minimum standards. This is what we do not find in the case of Mr. Abdulmajeed Sabra.”

“Sabra is being subjected to various types of violations. The second violation is enforced disappearance, and this is one of the most heinous crimes of all. According to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, if the three essential elements are present – namely, the deprivation of a person of his liberty, refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of his liberty, and placing the person outside legal protection, meaning that no legal standard is available to him – then we can say that this constitutes enforced disappearance. Mr. Abdulmajeed initially went through arbitrary arrest, as I said, then enforced disappearance for a limited period. There is a third violation; according to the family and my conversation with them, and also what was published by the family, they found him more than a month ago, during their visit, with wounds on his face and in a very bad condition, which suggests that he may have been subjected to torture. This is a third crime or violation, and it is among the heinous crimes to which victims are subjected at the hands of the authority of the Houthi group. Unfortunately, they do not find anyone to deter them or make them understand that these are grave violations for which they will be held accountable in the future.”

“As for the local texts and Yemeni laws violated by this group, they are many, beginning with the Yemeni Constitution. Article 48, paragraph (a), states that the state guarantees citizens their personal freedom, preserves their dignity and humanity, and that the law determines how this freedom may be restricted. This freedom may not be restricted except by a court ruling. The same paragraph also states that no person may

be arrested, searched, or deprived of liberty except pursuant to a court ruling and after there is suspicion of committing a crime. We also have Article 7, paragraph (a), of the Criminal Procedure Law, which states that arrests are not permitted except in connection with acts punishable by law. Here, the laws violated by this group are clearly evident. As for the Law of Advocacy, it specified, in approximately Article 56, how to deal with a situation where there is a violation or an act considered legally unlawful by a lawyer; he is not investigated except through certain procedures, before the appellate prosecution, in the presence of a member of the prosecution and a representative of the Bar Association, and according to specific procedures. A lawyer is not treated like any other person in the event of committing an act. With regard to Mr. Abdulmajeed Sabra, all the evidence and local Yemeni and international laws indicate that he has been subjected to several grave violations, with no legal basis whatsoever.”

“As for my assessment of the role of organizations and the international community in dealing with the case of Mr. Abdulmajeed Sabra, I may find that it is one of the few cases around which there has been broad consensus, and which has been dealt with extensively by these organizations and by the international community in general, as well as locally. This is because of what Mr. Abdulmajeed Sabra represents, as a human rights defender, since he is viewed primarily as a human rights defender, given that he undertook the defense in many cases of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons. Perhaps the greatest focus was on his being a human rights defender. During this period, I worked on his case with many organizations, such as Front Line Defenders, the Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights defenders, as well as the International Center for Lawyers and Judges. Many organizations issued statements, and they are very sympathetic to and interested in the case of Mr. Abdulmajeed Sabra, as a result of his work and what he has contributed.”

**Lawyer Huda al-Sarari:**  
**President of Defa'a Organization for Human Rights**

“The abduction of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra since September 25, 2025, is nothing but a direct targeting of every voice that defends rights and freedoms. Sabra is one of the most prominent lawyers defending prisoners of conscience, and his detention is a message of intimidation to everyone who seeks justice. More dangerous still is that the Houthi militia is making his release conditional upon his abandonment of the file of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, in unacceptable blackmail that reveals its hostility to the law and to the right to defense.”



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the targeting of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra is a concentrated expression of a structural crisis in the relationship between authority and law in Yemen, where the justice system has, in many cases, been transformed from a refuge for protection into a tool for providing a formal cover for prior security violations. The suffering endured by Sabra's family, his deprivation from his children, and his detention in harsh conditions that reached the "compressor cell" and solitary confinement represent a crushing of human dignity and a blatant violation of all international covenants and the Yemeni Constitution. Sabra's case is a cry to save what remains of the values of justice, and a reminder that intimidating a lawyer means paralyzing society's ability to access redress, which opens the door wide to the continuation of the policy of impunity and the entrenchment of the power of force at the expense of the force of law.



## Urgent Demands

Based on the legal and human rights documentation, we submit the following demands to the relevant authorities and the international community:

1. The immediate and unconditional release of lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra, as he is detained without legal basis and because of his peaceful professional activity.
2. Immediate and full disclosure of his place of detention and health conditions, and guaranteeing his right to regular and safe communication with his family and legal team.
3. Opening an independent and transparent investigation into all violations to which he has been subjected, including enforced disappearance, prolonged solitary confinement, and harsh treatment, and holding those responsible accountable.
4. The immediate cessation of all forms of blackmail and bargaining practiced against Sabra, which condition his abandonment of files defending detainees in exchange for obtaining his freedom.
5. Calling on the international community, particularly the Human Rights Council and the special rapporteurs, to intensify diplomatic and human rights pressure to end practices of arbitrary detention against lawyers and activists in Yemen.
6. Ensuring the protection of the independence of the legal profession and guaranteeing lawyers' ability to perform their professional duties without fear of retaliation or false judicial prosecution.





# The Cost of Advocacy

A report documenting seven months of detention of lawyer  
Abdulmajeed Sabra and its human and legal